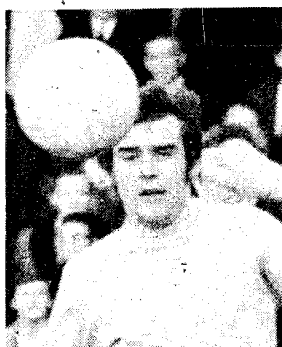


# TITLE GRIP SLIPPING



**GEOFF ANTHONY**  
... still struggling.

**WYCOMBE WANDERERS'** once vice-like grip on the Isthmian League title weakened still further when Sutton pulled back with a late equaliser at Loakes Park on Saturday, to make it three consecutive championship draws for Brian Lee's men.

**By MIKE WHITESMAN: Wycombe W. 2, Sutton Utd. 2**

As a result of Enfield's sound win against Kingstonian, the position was more evenly balanced. Wanderers had a valuable eight-points advantage, but the reigning champions are set to catch up with four games—all of them versus lowly opposition—in hand.

Yet if the two extra points Wanderers held and lost in the course of eight days are to be mourned then at least Saturday's draw confirmed that neither Barking nor St. Albans any longer maintain even a mathematical chance of honours. And

Sutton could drop out of the race any time.

While Wanderers now wait until Saturday to play off the next of their four remaining fixtures at Leytonstone, Enfield won 1-0 on Monday at home to Wealdstone, who have already taken a lucky point off both Sutton and Wycombe in the past fortnight. On Thursday, the champions entertain Clapton.

With a late gained 2-1 victory over Sutton at Gander Green Lane behind them in early season, Wycombe had the chance to clinch a "double" on Saturday.

But Sid Cann's men seemed totally averse to that particular idea, occasionally substituting

brawn for the basic skills they obviously have.

If not a better team than Wanderers, they nonetheless had some equally fine individuals on field, and defiantly opened the scoring in the 15th minute.

Inside forward with a tendency to move all the way into attack, Larry Pritchard rammed the ball into a crowded Wycombe area, and saw his shot unwillingly deflected by the body of Peter Suddaby into goal. John Maskell had the original direction covered but was caught completely wrong-footed by the course of events.

Ten minutes later, Wanderers were applying the heat for an equaliser, and Barry Baker caught the mood by steaming in for a first-time volley which whizzed over the Sutton crossbar.

And 60 seconds later, United broke under the pressure, allowing a much promised Wycombe equaliser to find the mark.

A Tony Horseman free kick crashed into the 'box' off the left flank, and after a four-man tussle involving John Delaney, Johnny Hutchinson and a covering pair of defenders, it was Hutchinson who won possession and made it 1-1.

The ex-Wealdstone winger's recent string of top class displays continued on Saturday, but it made him a marked man.

Offender in chief, Dario Gradi was lucky to still be on field at least once in each half, the first time for attempting to punch Horseman, and the second for back-hacking in retaliation after a minor push by Searle.

By half-time Wycombe had worked themselves into a strong victory position. A goal, softly handed to Keith Searle who was left unmarked by the far post by poor defensive covering, let them take a deserved lead after 37 minutes, and they had by now proved themselves the stronger all round combination.

Horseman sent in a tremendous waist-high shot which only the 'sacrificed' head of Gradi diverted from a certain third goal.

The new half saw a surprisingly more subdued home side, showing little signs of such immediate interest in the League title. Geoff Anthony was still struggling up front formwise.

The forwards' persistent failure to follow up their colleagues cost at least two possible goals inside five minutes of the resumption.

It was lucky for Sutton whose defence work was riddled by symptoms of cracked nerves.

In the 51st minute, goalkeeper Roffey managed to get a foot to stop Horseman en route to goal, and in the clearance, Ted Powell almost capped a poor display by putting through his own net.

Again Sutton were fortunate not to fall further behind after 72 minutes when Horseman came to the forefront of play once more, prodding the ball at goal only to see his shot tap a post.

United refused to cower back on total defence, and with nine minutes to play, set the cat firmly amongst the pigeons as Bladon's corner was headed on by Brookes for Peter Drabwell to lash home the equalising goal.

And they almost—so very nearly that the possible consequences still send a shudder through Loakes Park terraces—snatched a cheeky winner in injury time.

Left-winger Mellows finished off a quick-fire breakaway movement by rapping the Wanderers' post with Maskell beaten.

**WYCOMBE WANDERERS:** J. Maskell, I. Rundle, C. Gale, P. Suddaby, J. Delaney, J. Lailey, G. Anthony, B. Baker, K. Searle, A. Horseman, J. Hutchinson. Sub.: K. Blunt.

**SUTTON UNITED:** D. Roffey, R. Brookes, D. Clarke, E. Powell, K. Grose, D. Gradi, T. Bladon, T. Waughman, P. Drabwell, L. Pritchard, M. Mellows. Sub.: R. McLeod.